

Which role foreign policy plays in a nations sovereignty and development

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This futuristic thought of 35th US president is enough to cast focus on the importance foreign policy plays in a nations sovereignty and development. Much of India foreign policy in last few years has revolved around her economic diplomacy and support for multilateralism.

Over the last 75 years we have seen India's foreign policy going through various phases, with one starting from conservative foreign policy, that remained unaltered for most part of the century, though it did shift to USSR for some time, to a more balanced one, and that also encompasses India's journey from NAM, favouring nuclear disarmament to getting place in MTCR. That's definitely something to cheer about.

Economic strength and foreign policy go hand in hand. India's foreign policy in recent years can be broadly divided into four categories to better understand the outcomes of various initiatives that have been taken in order to increase India's prominence at world level, these are: East Asia Policy, West Asia Policy, Countries of strategic importance(that includes UNSC members and multilateral groups) and neighbourhood. Lets see these one by one.

ASEAN- India's act east policy is just an extension of look east policy that focuses on building long term and comprehensive relations with members of ASEAN. The importance of ASEAN can be understood from the strategic location of the ASEAN countries and the volume of trade that takes place through the Indian Ocean. With few member countries having substantial oil and mineral reserves and other member countries opening up their economies, and given India's improved relations with member countries, we

definitely stand a chance to tap into the ocean of opportunities. The will help not only in increased businesses but also will go a long way in developing infrastructure in north-east India by means of improved connectivity with member nations, e. g. India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, kaladan project.

Given the fact that, two way trade between China and ASEAN is almost seven times that of Indo-ASEAN, still there lies a tremendous opportunity. With India joining RCEP and FTA, we may expect things to be favourable for us in coming years and will also help India in becoming regional superpower.

West Asia Policy: With Indian diaspora constituting single largest community in some of the gulf countries and contributing almost about 60 percent of the total inward remittances that country receives is enough to describe the significance of the west Asian nations in India's foreign policy.

Traditionally relations of both the parties have been dominated by two factors: energy and labour, but over the last few years things have changed, with most of the gulf countries recognizing India's increasing global might and India seeing west Asia not only as an energy provider but also a key player in its anti-terrorism campaign and a security partner. Link-West policy followed by government directly indicates India's eagerness and intentions to maintain a healthy and cordial relations with Gulf countries. This initiative has been welcomed by various gulf countries and same is reflected from the various agreements that both parties have signed in some key areas like- Anti-terrorism, defence, infrastructure, IT, tourism.

Countries of strategic importance:

Iran: Iran forms a major strategic partner not only because it accounts for largest crude oil exporter to India but also due to relevance of chabahar port that India sees as a major project to access gas resources in central Asia and also to counter China's String of Pearls and CPEC plan and using it as a base to connect to Europe, Central Asian countries and Russia by developing a channel of road and rail networks under project named North South Transport Corridor. The strategic importance of Iran can be understood from the fact that despite several sanctions from US, India has continued to trade and invest in Iran.

Israel: For long Israel has been strategic partner for India in areas like defence and intelligence sharing, until very recently both countries have decided to extend their relationship in areas like health, agriculture, biotech in which Israel has expertise and it sees India as a potential which in turn will provide India a chance to maximize its trade relation with Israel so that it can counter China's increasing influence in Israel . So far outcome has been positive as in last few years Indian IT and pharma companies have made significant investments in Israel.

UNSC + 1 (excluding china) and multilateral agencies: We have had some success when it comes to our relations with multilateral organizations with most of them recognizing India's significance at a global level and giving weightage to India on issues of international importance and are pushing for India's entry to UNSC and NSG. India's proactive participation in Paris Climate Change Agreement, G 20, UN observer in few African countries have

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been instrumental in creating a positive outlook towards India. Though there have been conflict of interest in last few years but overall the relations have been positive and favourable for India.

China: When it comes to china, it has been so far proved to be uncharted territory. There is no denial in the fact that we can not match flexing power of communist china in many fields. Ambitious plans of ruling regime that includes OBOR, CPEC, increasing influence in South-China sea and Europe has left policy makers baffled. India faces a two way threat from China: one in terms of widening trade deficit and other with increasing Red army's deterrent behaviour along border. We have seen convergence of power being unfolded in the region that has caught attention of the entire world. Though we have tried to keep trade diplomacy alive but little has come to our benefit. The best response to deal with China's might will be to invest heavily in our holistic growth and solve the issue without foreign interference as it may ire China even more.

India's Neighbourhood: A peaceful, stable and predictable neighbour is an important aspect for growth of any country. But this is not the case when it comes to India. Take for example, India has border issues with Pakistan and Bangladesh, Nepal has always used China to imitate India, state sponsored terrorism from Pakistan, increase in influence of China in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal with former even buying stakes in stock-exchanges of Bangladesh. Despite best of our efforts we have not been successful in negating these effect, though, to some extent our inability to invest heavily in our neighbour has created this situation for us. And to overcome this

challenge there is an urgent need to have specific plans for each of our immediate neighbours and those in the Indian Ocean.

There are turbulences not only in regions away from us but also in our neighbourhood. The world economy is mired in trade-war that has engaged top economies of the world and has created uncertainty and scepticism in developing countries, the success of India's foreign policy will depend on how we are able to balance both ends of the world without putting our interest at risk and ensure that India's influence at international level increases. How we can leverage from competition and cooperation will decide how effective our foreign policy turns out to be.